Memorandum

At City Council’s direction from November 15, 2016, we have changed course from developing a “points based” landscape ordinance. City Council asked us to take the background research and information and comments we received during the “points based” effort to make changes to the landscape standards that follow a more traditional format. City Council asked staff to draft new standards and to meet with the work group before proceeding with a comprehensive new ordinance.

The attached draft standards were prepared by staff based upon the work group’s previous comments and input, City Council’s comments, and staff research. The work group previously identified a number of complaints about the monotony of planting requirements, the need for parking lot screening (especially side lot lines), concerns about maintenance and survivability, ensuring that storm water treatment is incorporated, and a desire for opportunities to be more creative, to summarize a few of the comments. Staff believes the consensus from the work group during the drafting of the points based system was that some of the keys to successful landscaping would include soil conditions, planting variety, focus on front yard landscaping rather than screening, and alternative parking lot options. Staff also emphasized that it was important to not dilute overall planting requirements while creating more options or alternatives for sites.

With this in mind, the attached standards emphasize front yard landscaping, landscaping of parking lot areas between a building and the street, plant variety, allowing for stormwater treatment measures, and additional options to meet planting requirements, and increased visual interest for landscaped areas. As a package of front yard and parking standards, the L2 screening requirement that is frequently employed within the city would be eliminated for commercial sites. Residential sites would maintain their requirements for screening, but the overall planting standards for these sites would be adjusted to add overall site landscaping requirements and modify the foundation planting standards.

We look forward to walking through the proposed standards on Tuesday. If you have any questions or comments on how the Landscape Update, please contact Justin Moore at jrmooresimpact@city.ames.is.us
Proposed Landscape Standards

Parking Lots

Parking lots with more than 20 spaces

- Front yard planters required to be at least 10 feet in depth, Planning Director may reduce to 7 feet in certain circumstances, such as meeting required parking.
- Allow Planning Director to waive up to 10% of required parking within parking lots that exceed 20 spaces to increase landscape area.
- Elimination of prescriptive side and rear lot line screening requirements (L2 at 5 feet).
- Eliminate driveway shrub screening requirement.
- Require minimum of 3-foot parking lot setback without the mandatory linear shrubs and tree requirement.
- Allow alternative configuration of the 15-foot landscape median for three double-loaded aisles by substituting an equal area formatted as oversized landscape islands, e.g., the square footage of median landscaping may be dispersed within the parking lot in the pattern of parking spaces.
- With elimination of L2, now require 1 landscape island required for every 10 parking spaces. Applies to all parking spaces and islands must continue to be dispersed across the site.
- Islands require large canopy trees, unless, stormwater treatment features.
- If treating stormwater in parking lot, required parking lot landscaping can be reduced by 20%. At least 30% of stormwater must be treated within or abutting the parking lot as part of a bio-swale, rain garden, etc. Detention ponds would likely not meet this on their own.

Parking lots with less than 20 spaces

- Only require 10-foot front yard
  - or -
- Reduce to a 7-foot front yard planter, but provide a minimum of 20% of the area between the building and the street as landscaped area.
- No side landscaping mandatory (L2).
Multi-Family Residential

- Parking lot requirements same as above, with exception that screening will still be needed in residential areas.
- Modify the apartment foundation planting requirement, allow for some spread of planting in tight areas (presence of street trees can justify spreading as well)
- RH, RM, FS-RM 10% of site area as on-site landscaped open space requirement for RH sites (not including parking lot landscaping).
- The required 10% open space areas to be planted with a minimum quantity of shrubs or decorative grasses of 12 per 1,000 square feet of open space and 1 overstory tree per 1,000 square feet. Staff can approve some substitutions of planting ratios and use of flowering plants.
- Alternative overall site and foundation plans prepared by a landscape architect as “designer’s choice” may be approved based upon defined performance goals for visual interest, screening, and usable open spaces.
- Sites over 3 acres must incorporate a usable open space area.
- Decorative landscape requirements along highways to include evergreen plantings at an equivalent of one evergreen tree per 30 lineal feet of highway frontage (Hwy 30 and I-35 frontage), not required to be planted on center. 20% allowance for overstory trees may be approved.
Other General Landscaping Site Standards

- Staff discretion to approve alternative designs based upon topographic or unique site conditions.
- Stormwater treatment measures such as rain gardens, bio-retention cells, bio-swales may be used as credit for certain landscaping requirements based on plant variety within the treatment measure.
- Commercial and industrial sites require front yard or foundation landscaping equal to the 10-foot front yard landscape requirement if there is no parking along the front property line.
- Decorative grasses and prairie plantings to be added as allowed landscape plantings.
- Soil conditioning requirement in required landscape areas with a required soil organic compound of 5% and tilling of top 6 inches of the soil.
- Require six-foot fence for L3 for commercial properties abutting residential.
- Staff would like to promote the 6-foot fence requirement in L3 over the high shrubs standards when residential buffering is required for all sites.
- Add species diversity requirement of no more than 50% of one plant type. Minimum 4 types of plants required in planter areas.
- Significant art can count toward a reduction in front yard landscaping.
- Commercial or industrial site hardscaped amenities allowed for up to 5% of required landscaped area.
- Elimination of required side yard screening abutting same zoning district sites.
- 5% of shrubs and grasses may be substituted with a corresponding increase of flower species planted within the front yard.
- Decorative landscaping for commercial areas along Highways, requirement for tree plantings at 1 per 50-70 feet.
- For previously approved sites with side and rear screening, removal of current vegetation is not permitted without approval of an overall site landscaping plan.
- Modify all planting requirements for the front yards and allow for grass, shrubs, clustering, etc.
- Allow 18 inch vehicle overhang for standard parking stall when planters are a minimum of 7 feet in depth.
- Only detention ponds that are not fenced and include decorative elements will count towards the base zone landscape percentage.
- Loading areas outside of parking lots will require landscaping equivalent to 10% of the area.
- Front yard landscaping planting ratios will only be calculated on the first 30 feet of the depth of the yard.